



RAYMOND COGNAT

**manet**



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RAYMOND COGNIAT

# MANET

THE UFFICI PRESS · MILAN

*Front Cover Illustration :*

WOMAN IN A BLACK HAT

(Portrait of Irma Brunner, or The Viennese Woman).

Detail. Oil. 1882.

Louvre, Museum, Paris.

*Back Cover Illustration :*

IN THE BOAT. Oil. 1874.

Metropolitan Museum of Art,

H. D. Havemeyer's Collection, New York.

Translated from the French by Anne Ross

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STUDY FOR OLYMPIA. Louvre Museum, Paris

## MANET

In the whole of the nineteenth century it was Edouard Manet's work which aroused the most violent controversy, and was the first to provoke public wrath and official hostility, for the scandal of Impressionism which came several years later was in fact its consequence, and the Impressionists were never subjected to such lasting and comprehensive criticism nor to such savage attack as greeted the showing of the *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (*The Picnic*) or *Olympia*.

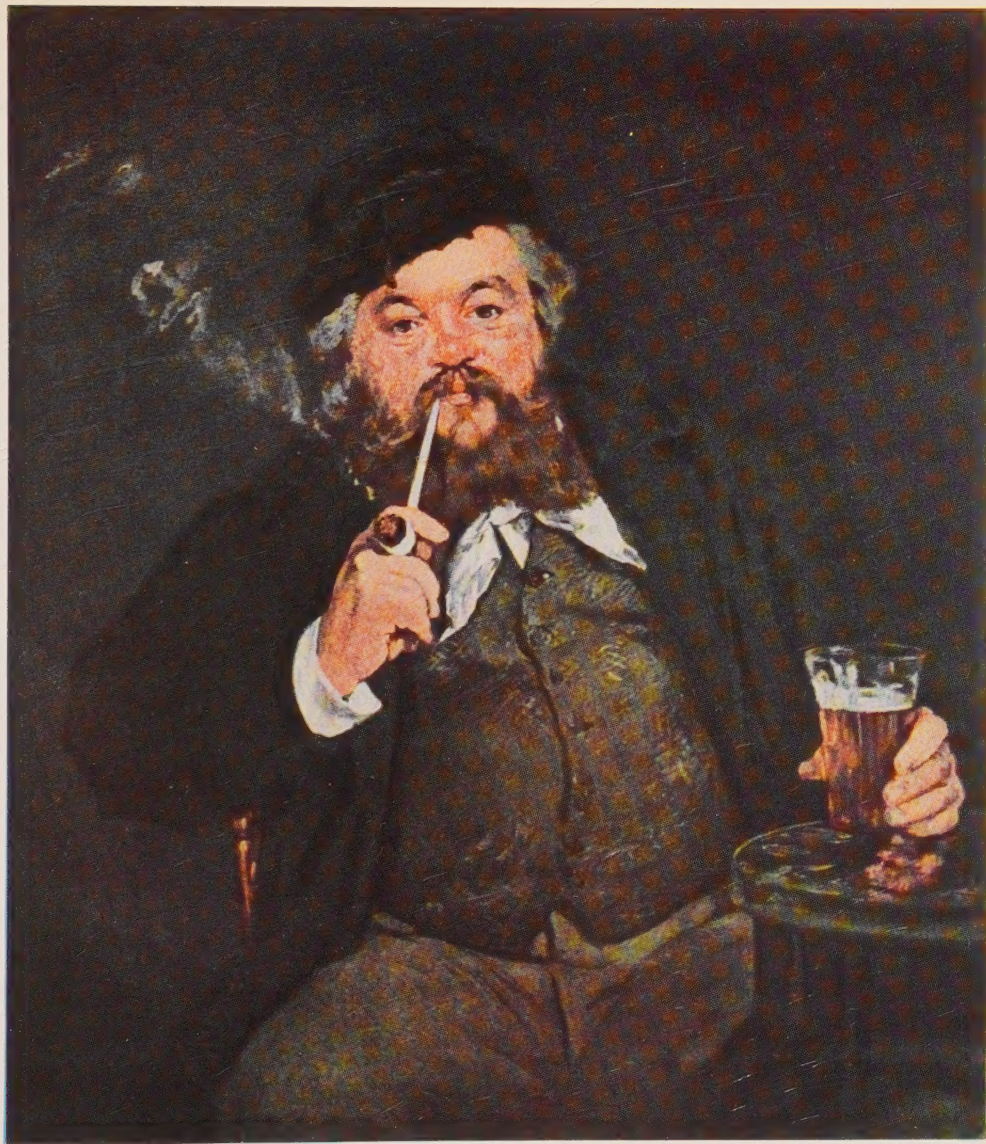
To understand contemporary reaction, one must first recreate the moral climate, the social and political circumstances and the vacillating balance between opposing ideas which obtained particularly in France, where the Romantics were developing a taste for belligerence, exaggerating the artist's rôle in the defence of ideological freedom and taking sides with the individual against submission to conventional taste. Art became a means to maintain and justify intellectual and material vendettas, thus giving the artist a new aggressive function which he had not had in previous centuries.

This creative independence permeated all circles, including those which were not truly ready to accept it. They admittedly acknowledged the principle of liberty, but more on a theoretical than a practical plane, and did not carry it so far as to allow a merging of social classes. On the contrary, the differences became accentuated, and one can even see how the upper middle class as it gained power tended to blend with the ancient or with the imperial nobility. In its new guise as ruling power, it brought in its train a whole section of the lower middle class which, though it thought its views were liberal, in fact had no desire to join in a battle to share this power with the growing and increasingly vengeful proletariat.

The seizing of power in the name of the Revolution was inevitably accompanied by a desire for stability. The political agitations of the mid-nineteenth century which succeeded the romantic fire of the 1830s therefore consisted partly of the impulse of the working classes — an emergent force because of the rapid development of industry — and partly of the authority of the bosses and the establishment which relied, now on popular movements to ward off attempts to restore the old regime, now on official authority, even if imperial, to defend themselves against the new populace. The artist could not sincerely subscribe to either of these contradictory standpoints, and the right to creative freedom conceded to him in all public pronouncements in fact made him suspect in the political view, for his independence was considered a threat to the established order.

Courbet's art shocked less than that of Manet, because it did not touch on fundamentals. He was a revolutionary in his choice of subject, but not in his technique, while Manet challenged the accepted conventions of the Institut and the Ecole





THE BEER  
DRINKER  
Oil 1873

Mrs. Carroll  
S. Tyson's  
Collection,  
Philadelphia,  
U.S.A.





LOLA OF VALENCIA  
Oil 1861-62  
Louvre Museum,  
Paris





THE OLD MUSICIAN. Oil 1862  
Chester Dale Collection, National Gallery, Washington, D.C., U.S.A.





Boy with Dog  
Oil 1862  
Private  
Collection





CHILD WITH A SWORD  
Etching 1861

and attacked established order, that is, the very foundation of society. Courbet, as a deliberate revolutionary, acted logically and in harmony with his own social milieu, while Manet as an involuntary revolutionary fought against his background, which made him continually feel its hostility.

In fact nothing in Manet's character, education or background prepared him to be a rebel. He was born on 23rd January, 1832 in Paris, into a middle-class family of the most traditional kind. His father had been private secretary to the Keeper of the Seals and later an Appeal Judge, and his mother was the daughter of a Napoleonic diplomat. With such origins, he was naturally intended by his family for the Bench, and when at the age of sixteen he announced his intention of becoming a painter he met with a definitive refusal. Since he could not follow his chosen path and had no wish to follow the one chosen for him, he preferred to become a sailor, and with his family's consent embarked as a cadet on a freighter sailing for Rio de Janeiro. On returning from the exotic atmosphere of Brazil his ideas were unaltered, and his family, seeing him so determined, in 1849 agree to allow him to enter the respectable and officially recognized studio of Thomas Couture. Between master and pupil there was swiftly established a total incompatibility which cannot be blamed on either, but was the inevitable clash between two generations, and in particular two very different characters.

If Manet had shown enough strength of character and independence to defy his family, one can easily imagine that he was no more flexible when taking lessons from a painter who taught a pseudo-tradition, which was already dead and gone, and almost entirely orientated towards evoking conventional classicism, which according to the pundits of the time was the apogee of art. Though he was still young and unsure of his own technique, he yet knew that more forceful expression attracted him. A typical anecdote of the time shows Thomas Couture summing up the rigid opinions which justified his pupil's opposition. One day when criticizing his work, he threw at him like the ultimate insult: « Come now, my boy, you'll never be more than the Daumier of your generation ».

Manet demonstrated considerable patience, however, and only after several years — probably after 1856 — did he finally break with his teacher. This period





LOLA OF VALENCIA  
Etching c. 1862

in Couture's studio left him with two important legacies: he had learned the need for drawing as an auxiliary to painting, even if the artist gives pride of place to colour, and he had also learned to reject academic conventions, not to hope to find true vitality in a professional model or a conventional pose, and to aspire towards a more authentic, sincere style through taking subjects from real life.

His travels in Holland, Germany and Italy and his visits to the Louvre explain the influences which one sees at work in his painting from this point on, though apart from Frans Hals and the Renaissance Venetians, Velasquez and Goya had already left a deep mark on his work. He was not to go to Spain until several years later, in 1865, but already before this journey he felt a strong attraction for that country, for its brilliance and austerity, its black and its vivid colours, its contrasts of discipline and violence, grandeur and intimacy, and its power and controlled passion.

If the *Buveur d'Absinthe* (*The Absinthe Drinker*) dated 1859 already stated his desire to seek inspiration from reality and not from contemporary academism (which was known as classicism), the first canvas he exhibited at the Salon, in 1861, *Un musicien Espagnol* (*A Spanish Musician*) shows how alert he was from then on to the inspiration of Spain. Théophile Gautier understood this when he characterized Manet as a «guitarero» in an article in the *Moniteur Universel* «who does not emanate from the Opéra Comique and would look badly in a romantic lithograph. Velasquez, however, would have greeted him with a friendly little wink and Goya would have asked him for a light for his *papelito*».

In the following year — 1862 — a splendid opportunity occurred to indulge his enthusiasm for Spain, when a company of Spanish dancers came to the Hippodrome and some of them agreed to sit for Manet. Singers and dancers were to be excellent models for his *Ballet Espagnol* (*Spanish Ballet*) and especially for his famous *Lola de Valence* (*Lola of Valencia*), of which Baudelaire wrote:

«But there glitters in Lola of Valencia

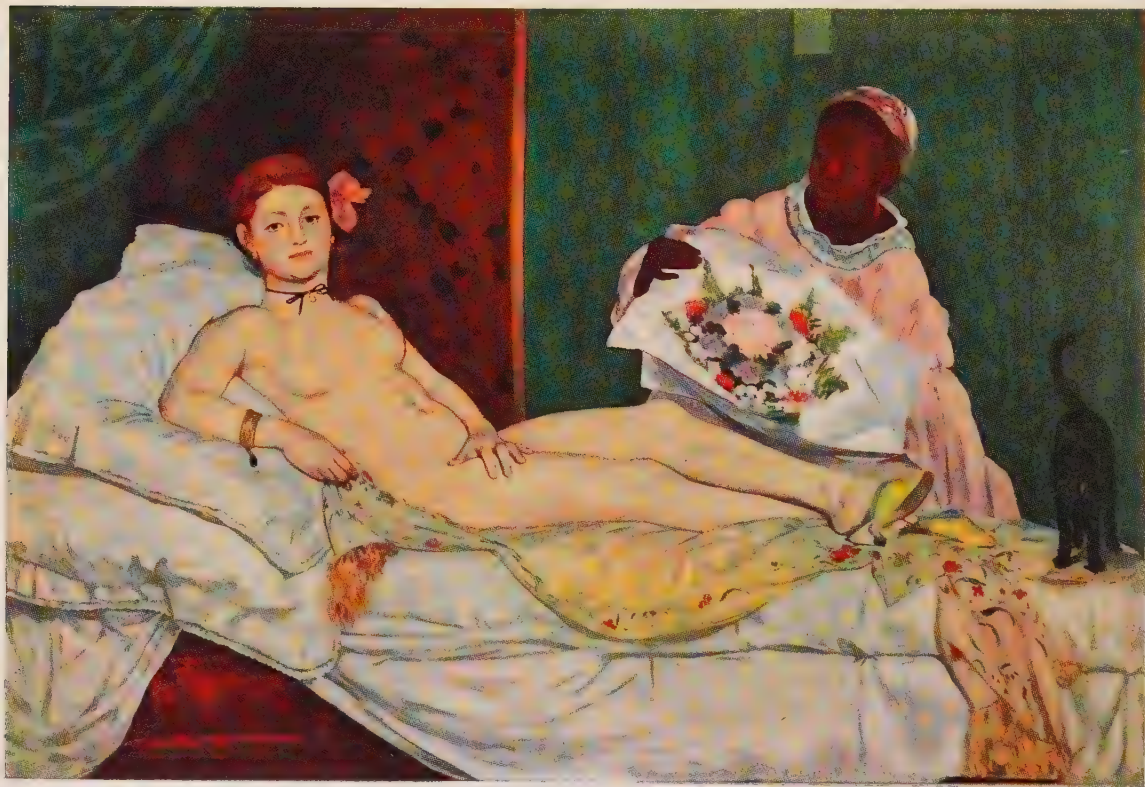
The surprising beauty of a pink and black jewel».

At the following Salon, in 1863, the scandal started. Manet had been rejected





AN  
ANDALUSIAN  
BEAUTY  
Oil 1865  
Private  
Collection,  
New York



OLYMPIA. Oil 1863  
Louvre Museum, Paris



THE PICNIC. Oil 1863  
Louvre Museum, Paris





MUSIC AT THE TUILERIES. Oil 1860-61  
National Gallery, London



by the jury and had sent to the Salon des Refusés (exhibition of paintings refused by the Salon itself) his *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (then called *Le Bain* (*The Bathe*)). It provoked a general uproar and the Emperor, visiting this Salon which he himself had started, announced that Manet's work offended modesty. The subject was adjudged definitely indecent, but the technique and the composition were also much disputed. The indecency apparently consisted in showing in the open air men in street clothes with nude women. To this Manet's defenders replied that Giorgione's *Le Concert* in the Louvre also contained fully dressed men and naked women. As regards the composition, to show how wrong the public was and how well Manet's work accorded with classical art, one must recall that several years ago an art historian declared that this composition was inspired in its entirety, in fact was almost a copy, of an allegorical theme portrayed by Raphael.

A private exhibition held a few weeks earlier at Martinet's gallery had already given the public a good idea of Manet's personality, and had also begun to provoke vigorous criticism. Now the outbursts became more vehement, and at the same time this scandal threw Manet's positive qualities into relief, stressing the original contribution he had to make despite his youth, strengthening his existing friendships and inspiring new ones.

The hostility towards him became much more aggressive two years later, at the Salon of 1865, where the jury this time accepted a large reclining nude entitled *Olympia*. This was like throwing down a gauntlet, in a manner wholly unprecedented. Perhaps, as Théodore Duret, one of Manet's earliest biographers, has suggested, this was due to the enlargement of the interested public to include those from a section of the community who had previously had neither the chance to express an opinion nor even to visit an exhibition.

It is however certain that Manet gained an unexpected notoriety through this scandal. All the newspapers wrote about him, and many mocking caricatures of him appeared. Crowds gathered in front of his picture, and derision and anger found pretexts which we find incomprehensible to-day.

The following story will give an idea of the extent of this scandal. Several months after the Salon closed, Théodore Duret stopped in Madrid on his way home



from Portugal, and in his hotel met Manet, who was looking for rest and escape from the hostile atmosphere of Paris. They immediately became friends and decided to return to France together. «At the station of Hendaye», Duret relates, «the immigration officer looked at Manet with astonishment, then called his wife and daughter to see him, too. The other passengers soon learned who he was and also started staring, amazed to see this painter whose reputation as a monster had reached them, appearing in the guise of a courteous, well-spoken gentleman.» This bad reputation was to follow him for many years.

In 1866 the jury of the Salon, no doubt fearing new outbursts, refused *Le Fife* (*The Fife*) and *L'Acteur Tragique* (*The Tragedian* — actually Rouvière in *Hamlet*), though such a decision could be justified neither by the subject of these works nor by their technique. The memory of recent events was still too vivid and the public still too rooted in its hostility to permit the showing of such nonconformity.

Among the friends who rallied to Manet's defence, the young writer Emile Zola was particularly vociferous. In the edition of the journal 'Evènement' of 7th May, 1866 he made his position clear and went so far as to declare: «A place is already reserved for Monsieur Manet in the Louvre, as for Courbet, and as for any artist of strong and uncompromising character... I have tried to give Monsieur Manet the front-rank position which is his. Perhaps people will laugh at my panegyrics as they laugh at his painting. One day we will both be avenged... It is impossible, I repeat impossible, that Monsieur Manet will not one day triumph and crush the cowardly mediocrity which surrounds him.»

This attitude was so obviously contrary to public opinion that Zola was unanimously censured for it and lost his position as a collaborator on 'Evènement'. He gained, however, the friendship of Manet.

The year 1867 was no better, for the jury once more refused the works that Manet hoped to see in the great collection assembled for the World Exhibition which was to open that year. In the face of such persistent obstruction, and in order to benefit from the opportunity to reach the international public attending this event, Manet decided to mount a personal exhibition in a hut erected at the



CHRIST  
WITH ANGELS  
Etching 1864

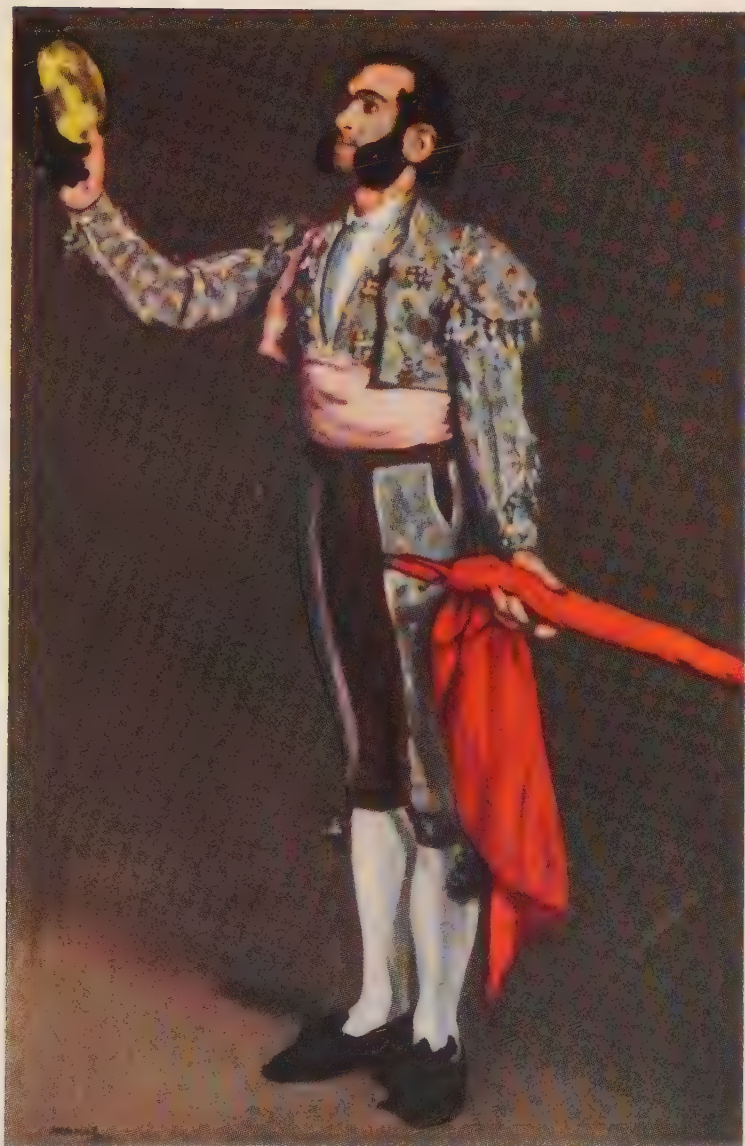


THE GIPSIES  
Etching 1862





THE MATADOR'S  
SALUTE. Oil 1866  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York





THE FIFE. Oil 1866  
Louvre Museum,  
Paris



VICTORINE  
MEUREND  
AS A MATADOR  
Oil 1862  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
New York





LUNCH IN THE STUDIO. Oil 1868-69  
Bavarian State Gallery, Munich

BERTHE MORISOT  
Lithograph 1872



end of the Pont de l'Alma, near the Exhibition entrance. Nearby was another building occupied by another collection of paintings, this time those of Courbet, who had had the same idea. Their protests against academic conventions confirmed and complemented each other, for these two painters sought a new artistic impulse through the direct inspiration of nature. Obviously the public saw in this a fresh provocation, and Manet had to undergo some further vehement criticisms.

From this moment on Manet became the standard-bearer of the younger generation of artists, and also found support among writers. Not only Zola, but Baudelaire and many others as well gave him countless declarations of support. The theoreticians of realism, and later of naturalism, and above all public opinion, made of him the leader of the school, as was demonstrated a few years later, in 1870, by a large composition entitled *L'Atelier des Batignolles* (*The Batignolles Studio*) in which Fantin Latour grouped around Manet, seated at his easel, some of the young men of the time - Zacharie Astruc, Otto Scholderer, Renoir, Emile Zola, Monet, Maître and Bazille.

Manet, however, had no love for collective demonstrations and pursued an independent path, even refusing from the beginning to take part in the impressionist exhibition which nevertheless derived directly from his work. This refusal did not indicate indifference towards younger artists following the path he had himself first trod, but rather a moral standpoint, for he was little attracted towards revolutionary bravado. He cared too much about official approval to act otherwise. In spite of rejections he persisted in seeking the jury's votes in order to exhibit at the Salon. It was only in 1881 that he was awarded a second prize, which placed him at last above competition, and a few months later (on 21st January, 1882) he was made a Knight of the Legion of Honour. One should note that he owed this decoration to the fact that his friend Antonin Proust had become Minister of Arts, and that his proposal had been seconded by Gambetta against the opposition of the President of the Republic. He had not therefore been generally accepted, but much water had passed under the bridge and quenched much hate since the scandal of *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. Enmity had lost much of its bite, but was to reappear





SPRING  
Pen and Chinese  
ink 1881  
Fogg Museum of Art,  
Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.

once more when after Manet's death a subscription was opened on the initiative of Claude Monet, to buy *Olympia* and give it to the Louvre.

The Legion of Honour was his final seal of official approval, for a year later, on 30th April, 1883, he died in Paris.

\* \* \*

One should not blame Manet for his love of public acknowledgment. He belonged as we have seen to a class with very moderate ideas, which could not be seduced by provocative opinions. He must have accepted his rôle as a rebel very reluctantly, only because he sincerely believed that his ideas were right, and because the dishonesty and fallibility of his opponents' views seemed to him obvious. He wanted to convince, rather than abandon his opponents, and with them the society in which he felt he belonged. In short he needed this approval in order to feel that the justice of his struggle was confirmed.

One must recall how much of his contribution to art was new, in order to understand the reaction he provoked. Couture's views when faced with his pupil's first works were simply echoed when Manet later challenged public opinion with greater assurance and freedom. One must think of all the compositions completed in Couture's studio which were the current triumphs of the Salon, of the teaching which denied the use of true colours and required in the interest of unity a conventional technique of light, which killed contrasts and reduced the whole to a uniform, unemphatic tonality.

Lastly one must consider the choice of subject, and the rigorous taboos which only permitted portrayal of nudes in allegorical or mythological subjects, and did not believe it possible to find in the contemporary scene any subject worthy of treatment by a true artist.

From the start Manet showed that he ignored, or rather wholly despised, these dogmas. With an aggressive candour he became the first champion of light colours, and soon the slightly younger Impressionists were to emulate him, and even dare



PORTRAIT  
OF LINA  
CAMPINEANU  
Oil 1878  
Gallery  
of Art,  
Kansas City,  
U.S.A.





PORTRAIT  
OF EMILE ZOLA  
Oil 1868  
Louvre Museum,  
Paris



BERTHE MORISOT  
WITH VIOLETS  
Oil 1872  
Ernest Rouart's  
Collection,  
Paris



THE CAFE  
CONCERT  
Oil 1878  
Walters Art  
Gallery,  
Baltimore,  
Md., U.S.A.



PORTRAIT OF  
GEORGE MOORE  
Pastel 1879  
Metropolitan Museum  
of Art, New York



to eliminate shadow, reject blacks, paint only in true light using actual colours and restrict their subject matter to scenes around them.

Manet was not entirely wrong in refusing to join their group, because despite his seniority and the example he had given them he was still a very different painter. Though he showed his young comrades the way, and though they were able to free painting from its sombre colouring because of him and what he did, it is nonetheless true that Manet continued on his solitary, personal path, never wholly subscribing to the Impressionists' ideas, except regarding the fragmentation of colour into tiny particles. For a while, by a curious reversal of things, he found himself influenced by them, particularly through his contact with Claude Monet, with whom he spent some time at Argenteuil. He returned with a lighter palette and new harmonies, while preserving his own characteristics. For instance, far from being rejected, black remained one of his favourite colours, and in the use of it he showed an exceptional skill which demonstrated a kinship to Frans Hals. However obvious, however free, his touch has nothing in common with the Impressionists' fragmentation. Manet has even a taste for flatness which is the opposite of impressionism, and made Daumier say of *Le Fifre* that this picture « recalls the faces on playing-cards » He retained this tendency, this feeling for areas of colour, even when painting in separate strokes.

Jacques-Emile Blanche observed quite rightly, that if one judges him by his influence on his contemporaries, Manet should rank as much with non-impressionist artists like Whistler, Stevens, Tissot, Fantin and even, he suggests, Gervex and Roll, as with Impressionists. This might seem harsh in the present critical tendency to forget that the Impressionists themselves are not unconnected with these last-named artists, and that it is they who declared their debt to Manet.

Contemporary art derives from him to a greater extent than is generally acknowledged, if only because of the right to freedom of individual action which he won after a fierce struggle. Besides, no-one has succeeded as he did in preserving in very deliberate work those qualities of freshness, spontaneity and directly expressed feeling which are the charm of a sketch.

No-one has demonstrated better than he the faults of an academism which



THE RACES. Lithograph 1864

teaches the modification of a subject by shading and graduated effects. He revealed the resources of candid colours which can be floated in space without needing geometrical perspective. He destroyed 'trompe l'oeil', which was still in fashion, and replaced it with a stricter, more honest vision.

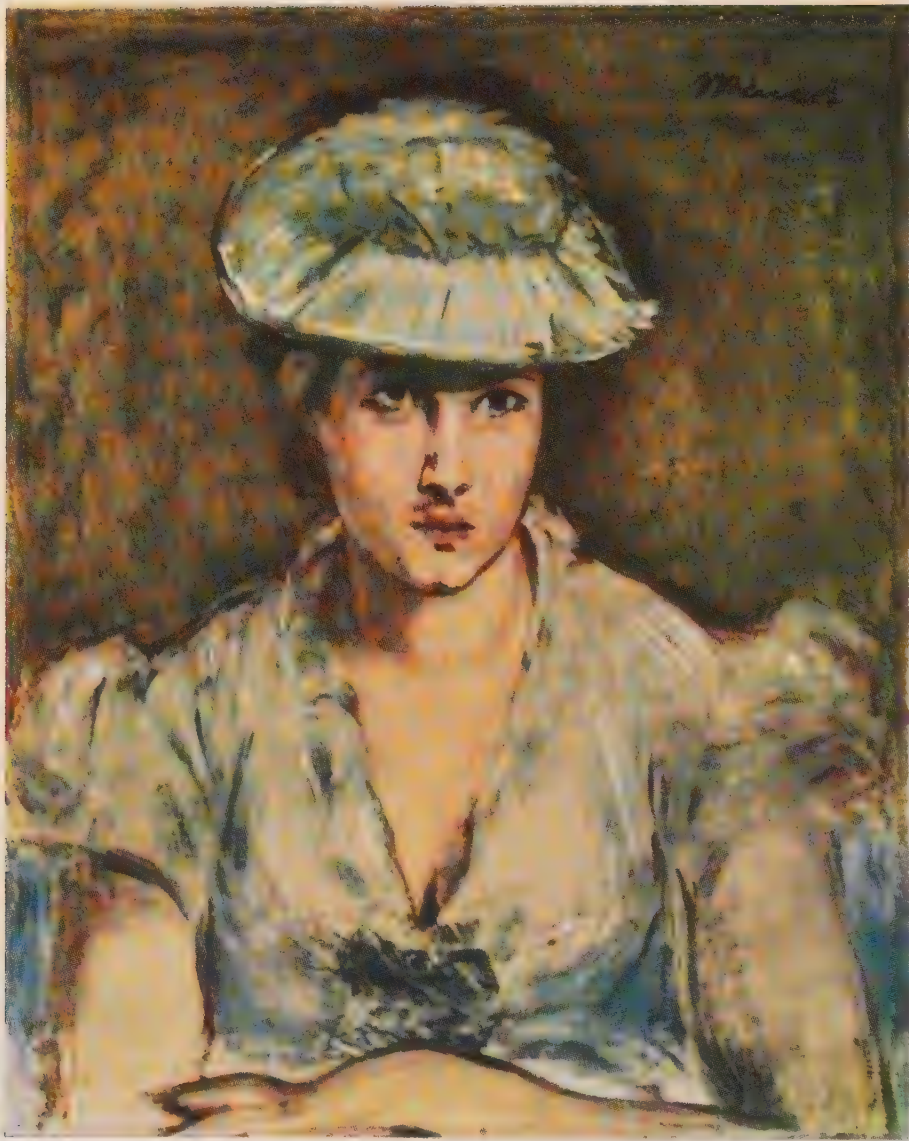


SEATED GIRL  
Pen and Ink  
A. Strölen  
Collection  
Paris





ARGENTEUIL  
Oil 1874  
Fine Arts  
Museum,  
Tournai,  
Belgium



PORTRAIT OF  
MADEMOISELLE  
GAUTHIER -  
LATHUILLE  
Oil 1879  
Museum of  
Lyon, France





FAIR-HAIRED  
GIRL WITH  
BARE BREASTS  
Oil 1878  
Louvre  
Museum,  
Paris



AT « PÈRE LATHUILLE'S ». Oil 1879  
Fine Arts Museum, Tournai, Belgium

TAKING THE AIR  
Oil 1880  
Jacob  
Goldschmidt's  
Collection,  
New York







THE BAR AT THE FOLIES-BERGÈRE. Oil 1881  
Samuel Courtauld's Collection, London

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN  
Pastel 1881  
Museum of Dijon,  
France







PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN  
IN A GARDEN  
Oil 1880  
Ernest Rouart's  
Collection,  
Paris





MARCELLIN DESBOUTIN  
Water-colour

It is not enough to dub him a forerunner of impressionism. It was he in fact who effectively joined battle, suffered the earliest blows and first breached the fortress of academism. He invented Impressionism before either its exponents or the word itself existed. Despite his innovations, he remained very conscious of his subject matter, just as he remained attached to his elegant, sophisticated social milieu.

Yet he deserves to be considered as the point of departure of modern painting. If one can find in some of his works signs of his kinship with Claude Monet, one can also find the influence of Manet in that period of Cézanne's when he used black as an intensive colour.

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*In the same presentation:*

RENOIR  
VAN GOGH  
LAUTREC  
GOYA

PICASSO  
REMBRANDT  
EL GRECO  
GAUGUIN

DEGAS  
DELACROIX  
CRANACH  
MANET

*In preparation:*

CÉZANNE  
GIOTTO









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